

Éva Patkó

P E R S P E C T I V E S

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PERSPECTIVES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	9
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CHAPTER 1

The Need for Change in Contemporary

Romanian Dramaturgy	13
1.1. Training Playwrights	15
1.2. Playwrights Making Their Own Way	17
1.3. Authorship	19
1.4. Possibilities: Grants and Applications	21
1.5. Publishing Drama	22
1.6. Authors, Our Contemporaries	24
The plays of Gianina Cărbunariu	24
The plays of Bogdan Georgescu	28
The plays of Ioana Hogman	31
The plays of Mihaela Michailov	34
The plays of Alina Nelega	36
The plays of Peca Ștefan	40
The plays of Thomas Perle	42
The plays of Saviana Stănescu	45
The plays of Elise Wilk	47
1.7. Contemporary Accents	49

CHAPTER 2

Directing Contemporary Playwrights:

Visky, Láng, Vișniec	51
2.1. Porn – Dramaturgical Universe Created by András Visky	51
2.2. Zsolt Láng's Plays Creating New Spaces	64
Four-hand piece about <i>Bartók's Piano</i>	76

2.3. Back to The Absurd – The Beckettian Vision of Matei Vişniec	80
2.3.1. Absurd From the Beginnings to Today	81
2.3.2. Vişniec's Absurdist Universe	88
The play <i>The Body of a Woman</i> as a <i>Battlefield in the Bosnian War</i>	90
The play <i>Pockets full of Bread</i>	92
The play <i>Paparazzi or Chronicle</i> of an <i>Aborted Sunrise</i>	93

CHAPTER 3

Director and Actor in Partnership	97
3.1. An Attempt to Find How a Contemporary Performance Finds its Identity, and How the Director's Identity is Affected by this Process. Notes of a Rehearsal Process	102

CHAPTER 4

Identity Awareness in the Postmodern Age	154
4.1. The Appearance of Virtual Identities	156
4.2. Media Identity How is this Working in Theater?	160
4.2.1 Media Transforming Theater	160
4.2.2. What Kind of Environment Does the Audience Come from in Today's Theater?	161
4.2.3. Industry and Technology Enter the Theater	163
4.2.4. The Rise of Image in Theater	165

4.2.5. The Performative Experience of the	
Audience	166
Simultaneous Image-Perception	167
Generations Y and Z	171
The Presence of Interpretation	
in Our Day to Day Lives	172
Virtual Performative Acts	173
Virtual Performative Acts Surrounding	
the Self	174
Performative Actions and Time	177
Virtuality and Theater	179
Facebook-Mania	182
Satisfying All Our Curiosities:	
the Internet	185
Avatars	185
<i>Final Thoughts</i>	190
<i>Bibliography</i>	195
<i>Studies, articles and seminars referenced</i>	197

PREFACE

This book is dedicated to students interested in theater and to fellow colleagues around the world from whom I've gotten so much inspiration.

Theater has the gift of creating new worlds, new languages on stage. My belief is that we must continue creating visionary worlds, universes that could not exist anywhere else but on stage. This is indeed a privilege, to dream of other realities than our own, realities that reflect – with the help of the spectator – on how our present realities are impoverished by a lack of imagination. Artistic activity is a reflection on reality, the process of thinking about reality and not merely an intellectualization of it. The spectator comes up with their own understanding and interpretation by employing their personal imagination and life experiences to relate to what is seen on stage. In the process of understanding theater it is more important to explore than to understand. The goal shouldn't be for the viewer to completely comprehend everything, but, rather, for the audience to probe the theatrical universe in front of them and to enter into dialogue with the performance's language and form. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, theatrical form (especially of the postdramatic variety) is marked by multiple hiatuses – breaks, lacunae, or gaps – that spectators actively work to fill with the imagination. This collaborative discourse between the spectator and the theater's "openings" of signification was named by Lehmann as the *theater of lack*.¹

¹ Lehmann presented his theories during an international workshop and seminar for young artists held at Kortárs Dráma Fesztivál KDF Budapest, Hungary in Nov. 26. - Dec. 3. 2007. The references to Lehmann 2007 are written based on the lectures professor Lehman gave during the English language seminar where the author of this book participated.

In his masterwork, *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook writes about the liberating work that the actor needs to complete in every rehearsal process, every performance, and every role. (Brook 1996) Without a constant re-invention of the self, of the identity, theater work is only a barren waste of energy. If the actor fails to liberate themselves from the confines of the self, the only result will be a deadened and deadly theater. Professor Cojar says the same thing in a short sentence about the art and calling of the actor: faith is the road towards essence (Cojar 2006). In the art of theater, in the work of both the actor and the director, essence is about the search for identity. Professor Béres considers that the creative artist is always creating an emergent and unique world of values which was nonexistent until that moment, and that this new reality begins to circulate through human existence via the actor's performance. (Béres 2000) This ephemeral, here-and-now characteristic of theater is the cradle of new identities that appear and disappear both within and beyond theatrical performance.

Questioning the functional structures of society is an omnipresent theme since the two world conflagrations have shaken our continents and wars keep us thirsting for peace. It is not only in politics (leadership structures, female under-representation, minority representation, etc.) and in daily life (sustainable living, ecological footprint, diversification of family models, etc.) that we experience the need to change structures; this need for social transformation is being mirrored in the arts.

Today's theater already questions traditional structures: the hierarchical operational customs and the behavioral patterns connected to it, the power position of the omnipotent theater director, the pedagogical role of theater etc. Four basic questions are always asked again whenever we are making theater: *why* are we doing it, *what* do we want to communicate, *how* do we want to communicate, and, especially, for *whom* are we creating the work?

Let's start with the "what" question. What do we intend to present on stage, or in any space where we make theater? Whatever we present expresses our mindset, our artistic approach to the subjects, themes, or problems we want to explore with the audience. Directing is no mere technical exercise in effectively "setting the scene," but is a communicative practice that shapes and conditions how meaning is generated via the theatrical medium. As Patrice Pavis so keenly notes, the *metteur en scene* (the task of "putting on stage") is different from directing, not only etymologically and in terms of their distinction in theater history and theory, but also when looking at the concrete demands of their respective tasks. (Pavis 1998)² In my mother tongue, "metteur" or "putting" could be translated as "to make something stand on its feet" or even "to make it work on the stage". When taken in this more metaphorical sense, the phrase *metteur en scene* is neither derogatory nor opposed to the work of directing but, on the contrary, offers me freedom to contemplate how I can make my theatrical ideas stand up on their own two feet on today's stage.

Contemporary authors from Romania have continuously impacted my work. Their writing and theatrical sensibilities inspire new collaborations, projects, and performances.

² "It is difficult to make a definitive statement about how appropriate and important the director is in theater creation for, in the last analysis, the arguments always come down to a question of taste and ideology, and not an objective aesthetic debate. We will simply say that the director exists and makes his presence felt (particularly when he is not equal to the task) in the stage production. During the 1960s and 1970s the director was challenged periodically by his „colleagues” - actors feeling hemmed in by overly - tyrannical instructions, stage designers wishing to catch the artistic team and the audience in the trap of their machinery, „collectives” rejecting any distinctions within the group and proposing a collective creation and, most recently, cultural animators acting as an intermediary between art and its marketing, between artists and city - an uncomfortable position, perhaps, but a strategic one." (Pavis 1998, 104-105)

I have directed and/or translated (or helped produce) texts from each of the authors presented below. As I explore their dramatic universes, I will attempt to discuss the theatrical and social interests of contemporary Romanian playwrights. These plays, written in either Romanian and Hungarian, tell us about the way we think about theater here in Central-Eastern Europe: what we communicate with our theater and how we try to deal with the historical past that has imprinted itself upon the culture of this region.

Throughout these chapters, I have inserted exercises that I recommend for theater students and professional actors. These exercises incorporate insights gained from years of directing and my last ten years of teaching at universities in Europe and the US. They are also an acknowledgement of the wisdom gleaned from my encounters with fellow artists, teachers, and students from so many different countries. From Berkeley, CA to Chicago, IL to Zürich, Switzerland and Alexandria, Egypt, the diverse local and global cultures of these places have not only impacted my way of thinking and perceiving the world around me but have shaped my personal approach to theater-making. And, of course, the common goal of making theater together has enriched my appreciation of cultural difference, as well as my search for genuine theatrical languages understood by all involved.

Theater director and pedagogue Éva Patkó offers a director's analysis of the distinct artistic, institutional, and sociopolitical practices of contemporary Romanian theater. Focused primarily on the rise of postdramatic dramaturgies on Romania's post communist stages, Patkó draws on her experience directing and collaborating with several of the country's foremost playwrights as she attends to the evolving intersections of text and performance in the region. Through essays, private directing journals, and practical exercises for the rehearsal room, Patkó invites us to peer inside the mind of a director steeped in Romania's theater traditions and emergent aesthetics, as well as the pressing cultural issues that define its current complexion. By turns scholarly and personal, analytical, and creative, Patkó's book is for both researchers and practitioners. Not only does Patkó shed light on the recent past of Romanian theater but she, with the spirit of a thoughtful innovator, strategizes for its imminent futures.

Evan Hill



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